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ONLINE COLLECTION IN THE LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

Households selected in the ABS's Labour Force Survey traditionally responded through a telephone or face-to-face interview, but from December 2012 the option of responding through online collection was introduced to incoming rotation groups providing respondents with greater choice and to ensure that data collection remains cost-effective. Since April 2014, all private dwellings have been provided the option of using the online collection.

This note updates analysis provided in the February 2016 issue of **Labour Force, Australia** (cat. no. 6202.0) and provides insights into the take up of online collection, and the characteristics of responses by survey mode: telephone interview, face-to-face interview, and online collection.

Data are presented for the period up to July 2016.

BACKGROUND

From December 2012 to April 2013, the ABS conducted a trial of online data collection. During this time, households in a single rotation group (i.e. one-eighth of the survey sample) were offered the option of self completing their Labour Force Survey (LFS) questionnaire online instead of via a telephone or face-to-face interview.

From May 2013, the ABS expanded the offer of online collection to 50% of each new incoming rotation group. This coincided with the introduction of the current sample, based on the 2011 Census of Population and Housing. From September 2013, online collection has been offered to 100% of households in each incoming rotation group and, by April 2014, 100% of households were offered online collection. Interviewer collection (both telephone and face-to-face) continues to be available for households.

The ABS used the initial trial of offering online data collection to a single rotation group and the progressive introduction of the offer to other rotation groups, to measure the impact on the Labour Force series of the move to online data collection. Statistical analysis during this period concluded that there was no evidence of any reporting bias due to the introduction of online collection. Ongoing monitoring and analysis of online responses, has not identified a significant impact from the move to online self completion data collection.

CURRENT COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Households selected in the Labour Force Survey are sent a letter and brochure informing them that they have been selected to participate in the survey. Since February 2014, survey respondents have been asked to use the unique user name and password provided in the letter

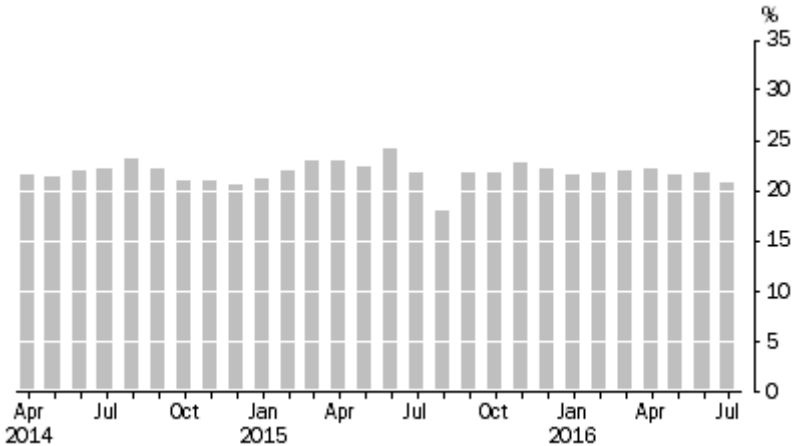
to register an email address and other contact details for the household, or to contact the ABS if they are unable to participate in the survey online. A notification is then sent to respondents who have registered their contact details electronically to advise that the survey questionnaire is available for completion online within a specified one week period.

Respondents who are unable to participate in the survey online, along with respondents who register contact details for the household electronically but do not complete the survey questionnaire online within the specified one week period, are subsequently contacted by an ABS interviewer to complete the survey questionnaire either via telephone or face-to-face. This represents an "opt out" approach to online data collection, rather than "opt in".

ONLINE COLLECTION TAKE UP

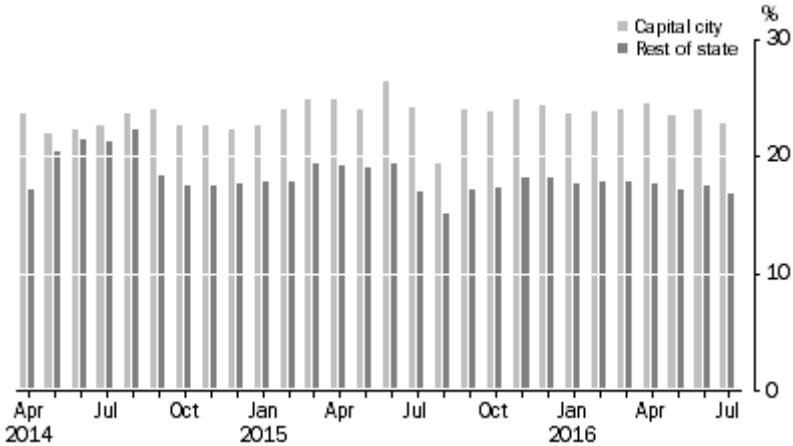
Online collection take up rates have been relatively consistent since April 2014 (as can be seen in Graph 1). The highest take up rate during the period was 24.1% in June 2015. The lowest take up rate was 18% in August 2015, which is the only time the rate has been lower than 20% since online collection was offered to the entire sample.

Graph 1 - Monthly Online collection take up rate



Graph 2 shows that capital city respondents continue to show a stronger preference for online response when compared with respondents in the regions in the rest of the state.

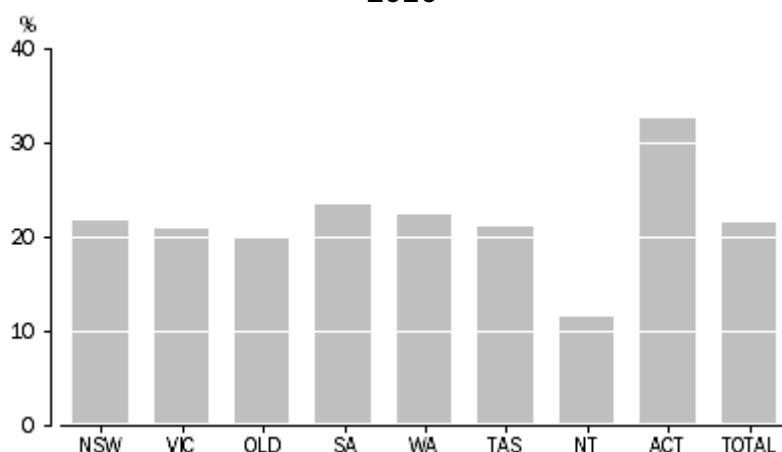
Graph 2 - Online collection take up rates, by Capital city/ Rest of State



Graph 3 shows there was also a higher take up of online collection in some states and territories than in others. In the year ending July 2016, Australian Capital Territory average take up rates

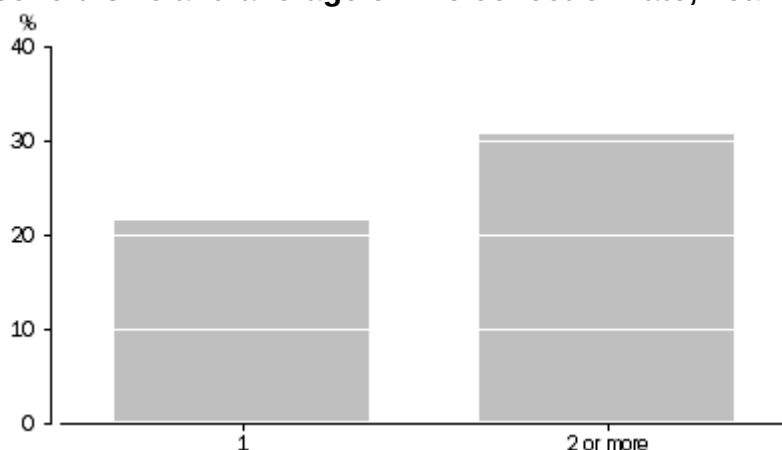
were the highest in Australia (32.6%), while take up was lowest in the Northern Territory (11.5%).

Graph 3 - Average online collection take up rate, by State and Territory - Year ending July 2016



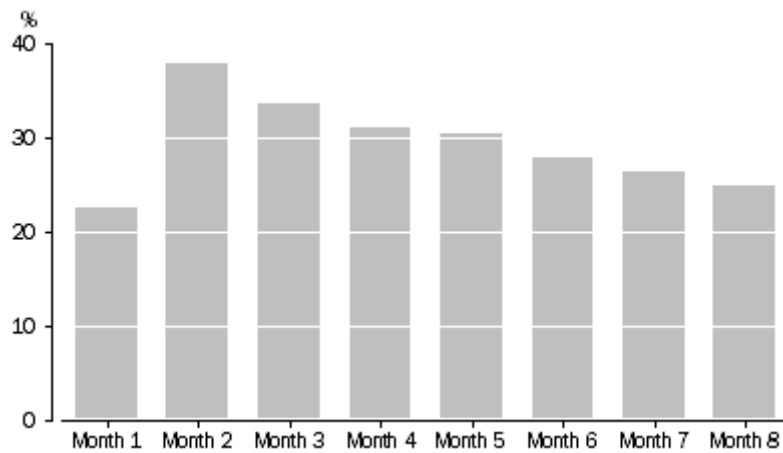
Take up rates by household size show that households with 2 people or more have a stronger preference for online collection, compared with single person households (as can be seen in Graph 4).

Graph 4 - Household size and average online collection rate, Year ending July 2016



Another notable feature of online collection take up was that it was highest for respondents in their second month in survey, and that this gradually reduces over the following months (as can be seen in Graph 5). This behaviour was seen across new rotation groups between January 2015 and December 2015 (with the corresponding last month in survey between August 2015 and July 2016), with self-completed online response increasingly replaced by Interviewer-administered modes (telephone and face-to-face interviewing) the longer respondents were in the survey, often associated with a greater degree of interviewer non-response follow up.

graph 5 - average electronic collection take up rates by time in survey, Panels ending Aug-15 to Jul-16



Analysis of the characteristics of respondents who choose to respond through online collection (compared with respondents who favour telephone or face-to-face interviews), continued to shows that:

- They were more likely to be female,
- They had a relatively higher participation rate,
- They were more likely to be employed, and
- Were more likely to work in higher skilled occupations (especially professionals).

CHANGING THE FREQUENCY OF FUTURE UPDATES

Given the relative consistency in online collection take up rates and the characteristics of respondents who choose this approach, the ABS is proposing to reduce the frequency of these updates from six-monthly to annual, to coincide with the April issue each year.

The next article will therefore be released with the April 2017 issue, in May 2017.

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